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Letters of
Christopher Mitchell

No. 3.

and Wood House and

1.

Nantucket. 20th March, 1839.

Joseph Balch Esq.,

Merchants' Ins. Office,
Boston.

Sir: During a high north-
east-wind at one
o'clock this morning,
a fire broke out in
the back premises of
Capt. Benjamin Worth.
on Orange St., two doors
south of Rev. Mr. Edes'
Church, which destroyed
Capt. Worth's barn
and wood house and

three other ² barns on the
south; also Cromwell
Barnard's barn on the
west, and here we put
a stop to the destruction
without a single dwelling
house being on fire,
although the building
in which the fire
originated stood about
twenty feet from the
dwelling house of Capt.
Worth and the adjoining
buildings on the south.
The origin of

the fire ³ is not known,
but it is supposed to
have been from a barrel
of cold ashes on Capt.
Worth's premises. The
total loss of property
cannot exceed three
thousand dollars. Since
the June fire of last
year, the town has kept
a plentiful supply of powder
on hand for the destruction
of buildings when necessary,
but we had no use for
it this morning.

Very respectfully,
C. Mitchell & Co.

4.

Nantucket, 12th May, 1840.
Capt. George Allen, 2d.
Ship *Phoebe*.

Dear Sir! Your letter
dated 3d November
last in latitude 5 degrees
30 minutes south and
longitude 115 degrees 30
minutes west, was handed
us on 25th April by
your son per the *Omega*.
We were much pleased
to learn that you were
doing so well and that
you were so well pleased

5.

with your officers
and crew, and we have
no doubt that by
perseverance you will
get a voyage. We approve
of your going in with
the coast to get your
recruits, particularly as
you will not have to
go far from the whale
grounds and you can
return to the longitude
of 105 degrees much easier
and quicker than you
could from the Marquesas
Islands.

Should you be so fortunate as to receive this, you may consider that we are pleased with your determination to cruise in that part of the ocean where your letter left you. We consider your prospect better there than it would be to leave and go to the coast of Japan.

We were very sorry to learn that your crew has been so much reduced that you could

man but ⁷two boats. We
hope on your arrival
in port you will be
able to make up your
crew to 28, in number,
to enable you to man
all your boats. If
you do not man four
boats, we do not see the
necessity of having more
than 22 men on board.
This would make consider-
able difference in the
consumption of provisions;
but seeing that your offi-
cers are so good we had

8
much rather that you
would keep all four
boats well appointed.

We have been
expecting to receive let-
ters from you of a
later date, written after
your arrival in port,
but we have accounts
from Callao, Tumbes
and Paita, up to Februa-
ry, without your being
mentioned. It would be
well to look over your
instructions often, as it

may be of service to you
in the government of the
Ship's Company - and
particularly the closing
part of our Confiden-
tial letter.

In drawing
towards the latter part
of the voyage, the men
will not be able to go
so long without fresh
vegetables as they can in the
fore part of the voyage,
without great danger of
scurvy. This may be prevented
by touching frequently at
any of the neighboring

10.

islands and taking on board large quantities of Cocoanuts. They can be obtained when potatoes and yams cannot. Trusting in your attention to the interests of the voyage we are

Your assured friends,
C. Mitchell & Co.

11.

Nantucket. 3d June. 1841.

Mr. Robert C. Fay,

Dear Sir: Your favour
of 3d May was received
in due course, while
our Mr. Coffin was in
New York. You say that
Winslow and yourself
have concluded to try
another whaling voyage,
if you can get births
to suit you. Capt. Veder's
health is not yet sufficiently
restored for him to deter-
mine that he will take
Ship Christopher Mitchell
another voyage, therefore

12
we have concluded to
wait until the month
of September before we
commence fitting the
ship.

Captain Keeder has
gone on a journey into
the interior of New York,
with a hope that the
country air will be
beneficial to him. If on
his return, he should con-
clude to take the ship, he
would be glad for you to
come here and go with
him, and as boatsteersman, if
you have found nothing to
suit you better. We have

13.
not yet shipped any more
to the ship.

Very respectfully yours,
C. Mitchell & Co.

Assessors' Returns.

Returns made to the
assessors by Christopher
Mitchell & Co., May 1st.,
1840.

Company's Property.

Store and Land.	\$3,000
1 ship Peruvian,	11,000
Ship Phebe,	30,000
1 ship C. Mitchell,	27,000
$\frac{1}{2}$ ship Waller Scott	20,000

Oil in store, ^{14.} 8,000

Tax of \$ 396 paid.

Charles Mitchell's Property.

House	\$ 3,000
House, Skonset	1,500
Candle House	3,500
Lots	1,000
Bank and Insurance	3,100
Wharf (South)	400
Estate of C. M.,	200
Tax paid, \$ 53.80	

Gorham Coffin's Property.

House	\$ 3,500
Barrett house	1,500
Lots	1,000

15.

Triangle,	\$ 500
Wharf,	400
Bank and Insurance	2,100
Estate of C M.,	200
Tax paid. \$39.80	

16.

Nantucket, 8th April, 1841.

Messrs. Cartwright & Thayer,

Gentlemen: Your several favours of yesterday were handed us by Mr. F. Hussey on the arrival of the Steamboat this afternoon and we have to thank you for the news by the Acadia, which seems to be of some importance. We have charged your account with sales of 19 Casks Tall oil, \$1,634.72, and we thank you for the liberty given to extend our drafts to the greatest amount

17.

which we asked. We are unable at present to name the amount precisely which we shall need, but it will not be beyond the amount named. We had but just time to get our letter in the mail yesterday, which was the cause why we did not enlarge upon conditions contingent, but we should have considered ourselves under the obligation of seeing them performed as you have stated, if you had left the subject where it was by the

original contract, 18
and in this case, we will
hold ourselves ready to
furnish funds to meet
such drafts as you may
not be prepared to meet
from sales of oil and
candles which we shall
endeavor to keep you
supplied with as soon
as the season will admit
of manufacturing.

Very respectfully,
C. Mitchell & Co.

19
Stuck on the Bar.

A hard frost the
night of the 11th.

Monday, 12th April —

It has blown a gale
of wind from the north-
east and easterly all
this day, and in the
evening, it commenced
and continued snowing
through the night.

Tuesday, 13th April — This
morning the wind blows
a gale from the northeast,
with a snow storm. The snow
has continued without

20.

intermission through the day.

Wednesday, 14th April —

The Steamer took the Ship, Christopher Mitchell out to the bar, where she stopped for want of tide.

Thursday, 15th April — Came on a gale from the north-ward. The ship drove over the bar and brought up on the Cliff, shoal aground; struck very hard on the shoal. Not-tide enough to float her off.

21.

Sunday, 18th April —
The wind blew a gale
from the northward;
the ship struck very
heavy and beat further
up on the shoal and
sprung a leak — so bad
that the pumps would
not keep her free. The
water flowed as high
inside as the tide flowed
outside.

Employed Frederick
J. Swain to get the ship
off. He made preparation

22

by carrying the anchors out astern the ship and backing them, and on Tuesday, the 27th, all things being ready, began to bail the water out with tubs and pumps until she was free from water. The steamer then took the end of the purchase fall and hauled the ship about twice her length, when the purchase came a block and the steamer could not start

23
the ship with a single
rope.

Next morning,
28th April, the steamer
went out and towed
the ship in and took
her to the wharf without
any water in her.

24.

Nantucket, 17th Nov., 1741.

Captain William Allen,
Ship Christopher Mitchell.

Dear Sir: We wrote to
you by ship United
States, Captain C. G.
Worth, informing you
that our Mr. Charles
Mitchell had received
a line from you, dated
off Gay Head and for-
warded by the pilot.
It would have been
gratifying to us, if you
had written to us and
given us some

25.

information, which we are now in want of. We think you had had sufficient time to ascertain what part of their clothing the deserters left behind, or whether they left anything. You would oblige us if in your next letter, you would give us the lays which you put against the names of the men which we sent to replace the deserters and also

26.

keep us informed of all other desertions which may take place. if any, and all contracts which you may make for supplying their places.

In the letter above spoken of. we took the liberty to suggest something in regard to the treatment which we would recommend for you to observe toward your officers and men, well knowing that without a

27.

hearty cooperation on the part of the officers and men, the Master must have a very difficult task to perform.

The most ready way to secure this Cooperation is to make the men feel that they are respected as men and not-treated like brutes — and all this lays with the Master of the ship — a burden if he chooses to make it so; otherwise a pleasure, and it is a pleasing

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reflection to us to believe
that we have confided
our interests to one who
will view this subject
in the same light
with us.

In the course of
a long voyage. You will
meet with many persons
who will give you to under-
stand that they feel
themselves qualified to
give advice to others:
those are the persons we
would have you be on
your guard against
and not suffer such

persons to entrap you into a disclosure of your design in regard to the prosecution of your voyage and not make them acquainted with any little difficulties which you may have to encounter; but keep your own counsel and not ^{give} have these persons an opportunity to proclaim your troubles to the world.

We would also have you observe the same rule towards

others and let each one take care of his own voyage. There is no one so fortunate as not to have his full share of trouble in the world, and he is the greatest philosopher who is able to rise above and to step over these little stumbling blocks which are placed along our roads, at very short distances apart. It will give us great pleasure to receive letters from you

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often and hear from your-
self what progress you are
making in the voyage.
Please direct your letters
to C. Mitchell & Co.,

Nantucket. Any private
business or affairs
which you may wish
to communicate to us
individually will be
attended to cheerfully.
We are very respectfully,
Your assured friends.
C. Mitchell & Co.

32.

Nantucket, 30th, March, 1842.

Captain William Keene,

Dear Sir! We have written several letters since you sailed, the last - by the ship. Rose, Capt. Swain, dated 29th January. Last evening, we took a letter out of the post-office, directed to you, and carried it to Mrs. Keene, to find out what news there was from you. We found it was dated 27th December,

33

latitude $34\frac{1}{2}$ degrees. longitude 44 degrees. in company with brig Tileston, off Rio de la Plata, where you think of cruising a short time to look for whales. We approve of your doing so and hope you will meet with some success and that you may fall in with some vessel when you can find time to give us the particulars of your cruise, seeing that you could not cruise in company with the Tileston long enough to do that. If

34.

You will write one for the owners and enclose one in it for Mrs. Keene, You may thereby save the postage of your own letter which is something of an item at this time.

In all our letters, we have recommended to you to treat your officers and crew in such a way, as to make them feel an interest in the voyage. To do this, it is not necessary to treat them to cake, but as you stand so much above all other persons on board

35

the ship, it is no disparagement to you to let the officers and men perceive by your deportment that you respect them.

This will stimulate them to much greater exertions than they might otherwise consider their duty. Everything should be taken advantage of that will have a tendency to promote the interests of the voyage.

Your obedient servants,
C. Mitchell & Co.

36.

Nantucket, 20th July. 1842.

Joseph Balch, Esq.,

Merchants' Ins. Office,
Boston.

Sir: The assignees of the estate of Samuel Mitchell have declared and paid another dividend of twenty-five per cent, and we have received four hundred twenty-four 48-100 dollars for your account which we have placed on deposit in the Pacific Bank, the certificate of which, please

37
find prefixed.
Very respectfully.
C Mitchell & Co.

Nantucket, 30th April, 1842.
Mr. Avery P. Ellis, Sandwich.
Dear Sir: We have received your favour of 3d inst, making a demand for Ebenezer Stiff's voyage in ship Phebe. In looking at the log book of that ship, we find under date of 27th March, 1841, at Tahiti, that he deserted on the 3d April, the Captain

38

Caught him and Took him on board, and on the 11th April. he deserted again at the same place.

It is well understood by everybody concerned in shipping that desertion works a forfeiture. Now as this ship has sunk ten thousand dollars for us, we do not feel ourselves under any obligation to pay the voyage of a deserter and there are many reasons why we should not, but it is not necessary

for us to discuss this at this time. Suffice it to say that the ship did not obtain 1,400 barrels of oil in the whole voyage. We will give you an extract from the articles to show how the men are paid."

And it is further agreed that each person serving on board said ship shall be paid in proportion as his time of service is to the whole time of said ship

40
is performing her
voyage, any custom
or usage to the contrary
notwithstanding."

You
will not feel more
mortified at this decision
of ours than we are in
making it.

Very respectfully,

C. Mitchell & Co.

41

Nantucket, 1st August. 1842.

Doctor Geo. W. Connelly,

Franklin, Vermont Co., Penn.

Dear Sir: Your favours of
6th July was read. in due
course of mail, informing
us of the arrangement
you had made with
Joseph Deets Jr. for the
recovery of our lands.

Having to consult with a
number of persons, we
have been obliged to de-
lay our answer longer
than we should have
wished. We now desire
you to finish the Contract

42.

with Mr. Deets and take
a deed of the land in
the name of Paul Mitchell,
Seth Mitchell, Charles
Mitchell, George Myrick Jr.,
John W. Barrett and
Gorham Coffin. We
think that our deed,
securing the title to the
above-named persons
will be sufficient, and
this may be recorded and
transmitted to us through
the mail. In regard to
the remittance we made

43

to Doctor Espy in 1836.
we never received any
account from him of
the application of that
money, but believe the
amount was sufficient
to pay arrearages at that
time to pay him a suitable
fee for his trouble and
leave a balance to be
applied to the payment
of tapes for several years
more, which would have
prevented the last sale
and consequently the
present extra charges.

44

But under the present
circumstances we do not
like to give you a spe-
cific order for any
amount, as he may not
acknowledge any balance
due; therefore we will
write a conditional
order to enable you to
receive whatever balance
he may acknowledge,
and whatever that may
be, we wish you to
apply it to the payment
of future taxes and
also inform us when it

45
will be necessary to
make another remittance
and what amount.

Very respectfully,

C. Mitchell & Co.

Letter to Captain Teew.
Wanquet, 29th Jan., 1842.
Capt. Wm. Teew.

Dear Sir: The ship Rose,
Capt. Swain, being now at
Edgartown and near ready
for sea, we concluded that
a line would be accepta-
ble, even if we had nothing
to say of consequence, except
we say that it is now
something more than three

46

months since you sailed
and you have not yet
been reported; we
infer from this that
you have not been
so fortunate as Capt.
Holly of the Eliza Adams
was. He took a sperm
whale off the River of
Plata which made him
105 barrels. He arrived
a few days ago with
2,500 barrels sperm
oil and reports the
Phebe 38 months out
with 1400 barrels.

47.

We should hope that it is not for the want of a good look out that you have not done as well as Capt. Holley did in Crossing the Brazil Bank and now is the time ^{for us} to repeat to you not to be afraid to buy the people's eyesight.

We have written several letters to you since you sailed — pretty long ones too —

48.

in which we have
taken the liberty to
give you some
important advice
in regard to Conduct-
ing your voyage.

particularly that of
treating your officers
and men in such a
way as to make
them feel an interest
in the voyage; and
let them see by your
example, also that you
have not gone into the

49

Pacific Ocean to spend
two or three years
without getting a
voyage to remunerate
yourself and them for
that privation. Presuming
that your family will
write to you by this
Ship, it is not necessary
for us to say any-
thing further, than
that we believe they
are all well. And
now, wishing you
health and a prosperous
voyage, we are, most

respect-fully, 50
Your assured friends,
C. Mitchell & Co.

1842. ^

Messrs. D. McKenzie &
J. R. Shiverick.
Merchants' Ins. Office,
New Bedford.

Gentlemen: Your joint
letter of the 29th ulto.
is received and we are
sorry to observe that
you do not agree with
us in regard to the
loss on Ship Phebe

50

The first attempt to use the "Camels" was in 1842. When the ship Phoebe was just ready for a whaling voyage.

The experiment was unsuccessful owing to the breaking of chains on the "Camels."

In our previous communication we did not enter into the history of any part of the transactions. Not

51.

It is source of much regret to us that we feel under the necessity of making the demand at all. And our inexperience in such matters must account for the manner in which it was submitted for your consideration. In our previous communication, we did not enter into the history of any part of the transactions, not

52.

Knowing where the
explanation would be
necessary.

When the accident
happened to that ship,
we did not feel
warranted in sending
her to sea without
first ascertaining the
extent of the damage.
To do this, our first
operation was to make
a contract with the
Ship's crew to take
the cargo out and put
it on board again

53.

at a stipulated rate of wages, which is exhibited in the account, and also to pay their board, believing this to be more economical than to put on a sufficient number of shore men to do it. The next was to hire a sufficient number of lighters to put the cargo on board and this we did at as cheap a rate as

54.

Could possibly be done
by us. When the Cargo
was all out and the
Ship hove out, we
were very agreeably
disappointed to find
that the bottom had
received no injury:
Consequently all the
injury to the Ship was
in the upper works—
such as knocking off
chain-woles, tearing out
chain bolts and
destruction of boat gear,
which is covered by the

55

bills of Meigs & Sherman
& Atwood.

And now it
became necessary to
place the ship in the
outer roads to reload
her, and to do this
with as much dispatch
as possible, we put
on an extra gang of
hired men, whose wages
you do not object to, we
can discover no difference
between those men and
the Ship's Company who
were hired to do the

56

Same Kind of work.
The Elements we could
not Control, and
these had a large
Share, in increasing
the expense of putting
the Cargo on board
again: and yet if we
look at the whole time
in which the operation
was performed, it
would not appear that
much time was lost,
for we commenced
discharging the Ship

57

in the afternoon of the
29th August, hove the
Keel out on both
sides and had her
ready for sea on the
17th September and
she sailed on the
19th.

Thus much for
explanation, and sup-
posing your position
to be correct in regard
to repairs, we do not
see where you can
strike out more than
the bills of Robert

58.

Ratliff, the rigger.
Asa Meigs, the Carpenter.
and Sherman and
Atwood. Blacksmiths.

We cannot
substantiate all the
charges by vouchers, as
we omitted taking
receipts for the money,
which we paid to the
Ship's company. We
paid them off on Saturday
night, as the week came
around, excepting the
last week for which
we gave them credit.

59
in their accounts.

For the other charges,
we will forward
the vouchers, after
having fixed the
principle upon which
the adjustment shall
be made. Deducting
the bills above named,
it will reduce the
Amount \$147.83.

leaving the amount
for which we claim
Contribution \$1,057.32.

With a sincere desire
that the above explanations

60. .
may be satisfactory,
we are, very
respect-fully.

C. Mitchell & Co.

P. S. Mr. McKenzie's
letter of the 3d inst.,
in answer to ours
of the 30th ult. is just
received, together with
premium note for the
Ship Phebe's last
voyage.

C. M. & Co.

61.

The Phebe was
Commanded by Capt
Samuel W. Harris
and her log book
from the commence-
ment of the voyage,
on the 19th of September,
1842, until she was
Condemned at Pernambuco
in 1847, is still in
existence. When she
started forth on the
voyage. Captain Harris
received the following
"letter of instructions
from his owners:

62.

Captain Samuel W. Harris.
Sir: Having put you in
Command of the ship
Phebe, we wish you
to proceed to sea with
all convenient dispatch
and to make the best
of your way to the
Western Islands, where
you will take on
board a good recruit
of fresh vegetables, and
also look over the
ground a little after
sperm whales, and

63

Should you be so successful as to obtain any oil, you can put it in care of the American Consul at Fayal to be shipped home. Our consignees are Joseph Bradley & Co., Boston, and Josiah Macy & Son, New York.

After leaving the Western Islands, the prospect is generally good for sperm whales until you have passed the Cape Verde Islands, and again along the

614.

eastern edge of the
Abrolhos Bank and
off the River Platte
also, and wherever
you find sperm whales,
you are at liberty
to cruise. On your
arrival in the
Pacific Ocean you
will consider yourselves
at liberty to cruise
wherever you may think
the prospect best for
a cargo of sperm oil,
steering by your own
Compass and following
no man's lead because

65.

he is going to this place
or that place. You will
go into port as often
as is necessary to
refresh the crew and
refit the ship, tak-
ing care not to go
into any port that
is not a port of
entry; and you must
not prolong your stay
in port beyond the
time necessary to
procure your recruits;
social purposes or

66
Company must not
detain you anywhere.

We have had so
much cause to
Complain of what the
sailor calls, "gamming,"
or keeping company
with other ships for
the purpose of visiting,
that we hope you
will avoid this
error. When in port,
you will allow no
smuggling or contra-
band trade to be
carried on from

the ship, but if you have anything on board which you wish to sell for the purpose of buying recruits, you must first obtain permission from the proper authority.

You will not permit your men to sell their clothes to buy liquor with, and this article you will not allow to be brought on board the ship at any time

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except in a very small
quantity, for medicinal
purposes only. When
fruit is plenty, you
may give it to the
men freely, at the
ship's expense.

Serious
losses have occurred
both to lives and property,
by suffering the officers
to neglect a part of
their duty which you
will not allow; we
mean the practice of
leaving the deck in charge
of boat-steerers who are

69
not paid for that
service; but we
recommend to you to
require the mates to
take their regular
watch in the night
time, while at sea,
through the whole voyage:
it will be no justifica-
tion for them to omit
that part of their duty,
because it is not practiced
aboard some other ship.

We wish you
to maintain perfect
order on board the
ship, suffer no quarreling
among the officers, and

70.

do not allow them to abuse the men; but if the men are impudent to the officers, require them to report to you, that you may be the judge of the case, and when punishment is required, cause the whole case to be written out in the log book — both offence and punishment; but punishment should not be inflicted when it can be avoided as the success of a voyage depends very much

upon harmony and united exertion. It is well understood by you that in making a contract with you to take charge of this Ship, you are to head your own boat, as well as well as to head the voyage, and we have every confidence in your obtaining a voyage, by proper perseverance.

If you require more money for the ship's expenses, you are at liberty to draw on us for the deficiency

72.

and we would recommend to you to take a right whale or hump-back, and sell the oil to assist you in obtaining recruits. This is a very essential subject to be attended to, as the health of the crew depends very much on having plenty of fresh vegetables and fruit. When your voyage is drawing to a close and it is near time for you to leave for home, you need not consider that you are under any

obligation to keep your present number of men good, provided there are any vacancies by desertion or otherwise, or that you have men on board on monthly wages. If you have enough to man three boats, it is all that is required or necessary to navigate the ship home. We mention this to guard you against hiring men on monthly wages, merely to assist in navigating the ship; the law requires no such thing while you

74
have enough in your
own judgment to take
care of the ship.

On the
passage home, we wish
you to have an inventory
of everything on board
the ship which belongs
to her. made out; and
have the tools put up
in good order and
secure from being
pilfered. Please write
to us by every opportu-
nity and keep us informed
of the state of the ship and
progress of the voyage; and
when you go into port

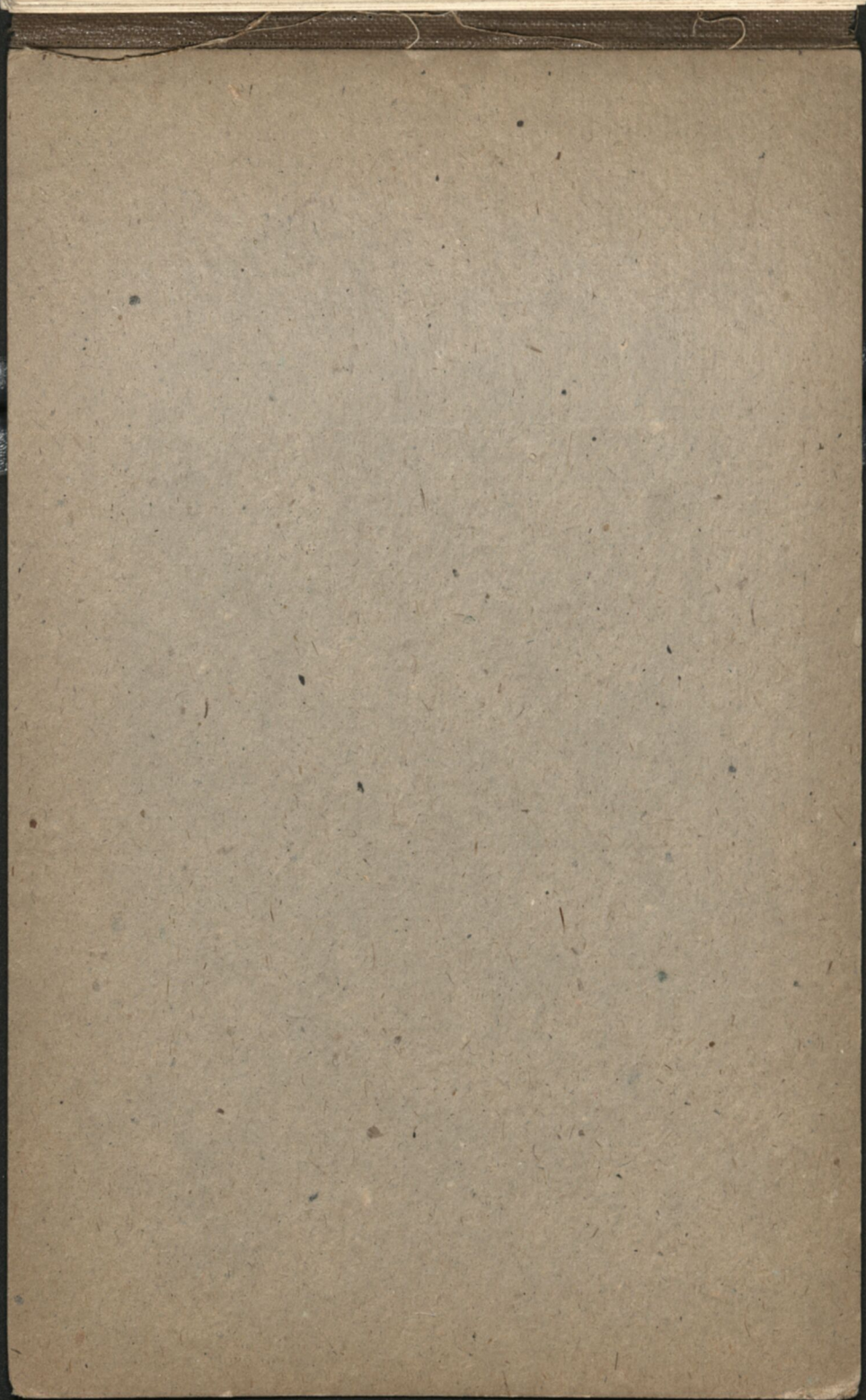
75.

no direct opportunity
occurs of sending letters
home, leave them in
care of some Consul
or other person. who
will take the trouble
to forward them by
first conveyance.

Wishing you a happy
and prosperous voyage,
we are very respectfully,

Your assured friends,

C. Mitchell & Co.



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